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# TRANSIENT AND PERMANENT ELEMENTS IN THE CHRISTIAN OPPORTUNITY IN CHINA

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*The present world-situation has given China new importance. The great republic will have a vast influence upon the future. Has Christianity anything to say? Will it seize the moment of opportunity? These questions are being raised, not merely by churchmen, but by those who look with anxiety on a world subject to the influence of vast nations among whom the ideals of Jesus are not definitely working.*

What hope is there of the continuation of the present opportunity of the Christian church in China? What can the church do to insure for itself a growing and permanent future as a transforming influence? Many of us have been thrilled by the progress of the past few years. There has been an increase in membership of over 25 per cent in the five years since the revolution. There has been an eager receptiveness of mind more marked than the growth in numbers. The educated classes seem for the first time to be really open-minded. The meetings held by Dr. Mott and by Mr. Eddy, the evangelistic campaigns in various provinces and cities, and scores of movements and incidents too familiar to every student of contemporary missions to need repetition, all tell the one story of a nation, and especially the thoughtful men of a nation, ready as never before for the presentation of Christian truth. It is an opportunity such as the Christian church has not faced since the conversion of the peoples of Northern Europe. If the Christian church is to win China, however, it must

analyze the causes of its opportunity, and determine if possible which are transient and which are permanent. On the basis of such an analysis it can then perhaps tell what are its proper lines of endeavor if it is to contribute permanently and increasingly to the best life of the nation.

In the first place, there are elements in the situation which are evidently not to be permanent. The present opportunity has arisen largely from the transition stage in which China finds herself. Until the last two decades she was virtually oblivious of occidental civilization and peoples. Following the industrial revolution in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Western peoples began an unprecedented expansion in population, wealth, and political power. They have gone with their commerce into all parts of the world, and today no nation or people of importance has not been partially Europeanized. China was the last great non-European nation to hold out against the West. The successive humiliations of the Chino-Japanese War, the Boxer year, and the Russo-Japanese War, and the growth

of intercourse with the West have profoundly convinced her that she must about-face. All the world knows the result. A passion for reform has swept the country from the port cities to the remotest hamlets. The Manchus and the monarchy have gone down before it. Change is everywhere. The nation is going to school to the West. It is trying to find the secret that has enabled Western nations and Westernized Japan to rob China of her autonomy. Why is the West physically stronger? Why has it been able to place China prostrate at its feet? Unless the secret can be found and utilized, thoughtful Chinese feel that further disintegration must result. Things Western have become the vogue, from foreign cigarettes and clothes to foreign learning and foreign guns. It is but natural that Christianity should share in the popularity. To the Chinese mind it is at present identified with the Occident. It is part of that culture of the West which must be examined and perhaps adopted. If so-called Christian nations are the strongest, perhaps it is Christianity that has made them so. To inquire into the foreigner's religion has become popular in certain quarters, although its acceptance may not follow. It is akin to the attitude of Japan in the eighteenthies.

Moreover, the popularity of Christianity has been increased by the fact that the missionaries have been the most accessible representatives of the West. There are more than seven thousand of them, Roman Catholic and Protestant, a very large proportion of the European population. They are in China primarily to help the Chinese.

They are seeking contact and are socially more approachable than the average merchant or consul. They are more widely scattered than any other group of foreigners. In very many small towns the missionary is the only foreign resident, and to millions he is the one foreigner they have seen or have come to know with any intimacy. What wonder then that when seized by the fever for modernization the Chinese should turn first of all to the missionary and should be open-minded to that which is uppermost in his mind, the message which has brought him to China.

This prominence of the missionary has been increased by the fact that he has aggressively pioneered many reform movements. He was the first to establish modern schools, and missionary schools are still on the whole the best in the land. He introduced Western medicine and so far has led in the creation of the modern medical profession. He has introduced new trees and new crops. He has been prominent in famine relief and has led the way in making it more scientific. In other and numerous ways he has been the pioneer of Western culture. This has given the church a hold on the nation which it would not otherwise have had.

Owing partly to the missionary's pioneer activities, Christians occupy a place of influence in the New China quite out of proportion to their numerical strength. Graduates of mission schools form a large proportion of those who have received an efficient training in the new learning, and are hence influential as officials and teachers. The prominence of St. John's men alone

is one of the outstanding features of the new age. Many of the leaders of the extreme wing of the reform party at Nanking, Peking, and in the provinces, including of course Sun Yat Sen himself, are products of mission schools and are either Christians or are favorable to Christianity. Many of the more conservative wing that surrounded Yuan are likewise products of missionary education. The prominence of all these has had no small part in obtaining the favorable hearing which the New China has given Christianity.

Moreover, there has been a real moral awakening. The humiliation of China's impotence among the Powers has burned deep into the hearts of the thoughtful. The newly awakened patriotism has led to some earnest heart-searchings. Opium has been grappled with and all but conquered. The moral delinquencies of the nation are being dragged forth and piloried. The teachings of all China's great sages have trained her to see that sin leads to national disintegration and that true prosperity can follow only righteousness. A Chinese scholar of the old school who was not a Christian was asked not many years ago what he felt to be the greatest need of his nation. He responded very earnestly with the two words, "Tao, Teh," which can perhaps be roughly translated as "righteousness." And the thoughtful Chinese has appreciated the strength of the chains which have bound the nation to its vices. The magnitude of the social evil, the official dishonesty, the lack of persistence of would-be reformers, have all appalled him. He has recognized the greatness of the moral task before China; he has felt the two natures

struggling within her; and consciously or unconsciously he has sought for her and for himself a source of strength. The older faiths are declining in popularity. They are associated with that past from which China is so zealously wishing to cut herself free. It is true that they are still strong and that earnest men, deploring the disintegration in morals which is likely to accompany any great social change, and frightened by the departure from the old customs, have galvanized them into a semblance of renewed life. The official sacrifices to heaven, to Confucius, and to the god of war have been reinstituted, for example, and here and there temples are being repaired; but this is chiefly the result of the action of a few alarmed conservatives and has no popular enthusiasm back of it. It is not strange that under these conditions thoughtful men should turn to Christianity to ask whether or not it has within it the power which can rid China of her sins, whether there is in the Christian church a dynamic which will give faith, courage, hope, and character to the New China and to its leaders. This explains in part the turning of many of the more thoughtful to the Christian Bible, and the large attendance at evangelistic meetings where the Christian message has been presented from this angle.

All of these elements in the popularity of Christianity are from their very nature relatively transient. No one can, of course, fix definitely a time at which they will cease to operate, but it seems fairly certain that that time will come. The transition of China will be accomplished sooner or later. Some time China will have ceased to go to

school to the West. She will have adopted what she feels she needs. She will become industrialized in occidental fashion. She will have reorganized her schools, her laws, her army, and navy, or will have had them reorganized for her. She will reach the stage where the new culture will have been firmly established and she will no longer need to sit as a learner at the feet of the West. The process may take longer than it took in Japan, but we have all recognized that it will some time be completed. Christianity will then cease to appeal as a part of that Western culture which China now so much desires to acquire.

Then, too, the missionary's prominence as a pioneer of Western culture will some time have an end. Eventually government and private schools will equal and possibly surpass missionary schools in efficiency. They will certainly have far greater funds behind them and will attract more students. Professional education will be too expensive for foreign missionary funds, and unless the Chinese church undertakes it on a larger scale than it now seems to give promise of doing, the future professional men of China will be trained in other than Christian schools. Christian institutions if rightly planned may hope to do permanently much of the secondary and college education and to be a useful adjunct of the government system, but they can scarcely hope to retain the predominant place they have so far held. Public sanitation, famine relief and prevention, and all charities will more and more pass out of the control of the church into the hands of the state. That at least is the tendency all through the modern world.

Furthermore, the moral awakening cannot but be transient, although its fruits both good and bad will long be with us. The slightest study of social psychology will show the impossibility of a nation or any large section of it long staying at the emotional pitch which is the companion of a moral revival. China will either relapse into her old ways or she will rest for a time after the exertion of reform. Such apathy follows all periods of unusual social exertion whether moral, military, or political. The new age may indeed even end in materialism. Should China, as seems likely, successfully reorganize herself, should she become an independent, industrialized state, given to armaments, factories, foreign trade, and to all the allurements of an age which has lost its head in the mad rush for the wealth which modern inventions have made possible, she may become a great materialistic power, a Tyre and Sidon, or a Carthage, and fail to make any lasting spiritual contribution to mankind.

The old faiths of China will not yield without a struggle. They are still deeply entrenched. The family life of China which is so outstanding a feature, especially of rural life, centers so largely around ancestor-worship and the ancestral hall; the temple has so important a place economically, socially, and politically in the village life, that one cannot expect the non-Christian customs and institutions to be abandoned suddenly. The change involves altering the very warp and woof of the social and even the economic and political side of Chinese life. The old religions will probably long persist, particularly in

the country. That at least was the experience of the church in Rome and in Northern Europe, as the etymology of the words "pagan" and "heathen" still reminds us. The new patriotism may turn to the native faiths as being Chinese and look askance at Christianity as foreign. Unless the church can make itself Chinese in leadership and thought during its years of opportunity, a generation hence it may find itself struggling under the odium of being non-Chinese and hence anathema.

There are, however, some permanent elements in the opportunity, some elements which if rightly strengthened augur well for the future. In the first place, the social message of Christianity is strikingly in accord with the best of Chinese tradition. The church of today is increasingly emphasizing that part of its message which has to do with transforming this world into the Kingdom of God. That has been part of its reaction to the new society which is the product of the industrial revolution. Christians are today attacking sin by trying to abolish poverty, ignorance, and disease. They see a new Jerusalem coming down from heaven among men without the necessity of waiting for translation to the heavenly city. Pursuant to this conception missionaries are emphasizing in China education, medical work, famine relief, and help for the unfortunate members of society. In all this they meet with a hearty response, for the Confucian school that has so dominated Chinese thought through the ages directs its energies largely toward making human society ideal. Its education was primarily designed to train scholar-officials who should give

their lives in the service of the state. The state was held to exist for the welfare of the people, and its success was to be estimated by the degree in which that result was attained. The church and the Chinese scholar are on common ground in their ultimate social object, however widely they may differ as to details and methods.

Moreover, the ethical precepts of Christianity awaken a hearty response in the Chinese at his best. His classics have trained him in moral principles of a very high type. The ideal society of which he dreams is to be realized, he believes, as a result of righteousness in ruler and in ruled. When once he understands them, he gives a cordial, although possibly a discouraged, assent to most of the ethical demands of the Christian message. There has seldom been a non-Christian people so well prepared by its past to accept the side of Christ's teaching which has to do with the duty of man to man. All who are at all familiar with the Confucian canon have been helped by its clear ethical insight and its insistence on individual and social morality. It is defective, especially in its reticence on the supernatural, a reticence which in the hands of many Chinese scholars has become full-fledged agnosticism.

And yet the mystical element in Christianity does not find in China a soil entirely unprepared. There were germs of mysticism in Confucianism. Taoism has more of it, although today it is sadly decayed and perverted. In Buddhism at its best we find a highly developed mysticism which is a preparation for much of the gospel of Christ. We have been reminded again in recent

years of the similarity of the message of esoteric Buddhism to that of Christianity, a similarity which in many points is nearly an identity, so nearly so that some have seen in Mahayana Buddhism Christianity in disguise. The free use by Christian missionaries of religious terms coined by Buddhism is but one instance of the many ways in which it has been a preparer of the road. Even some of the crass superstitions of the Chinese have not been without value. What are they but gropings, blind and often perverted it is true, but still gropings, for the True Light?

Then there has been the great appeal that Christianity has always had, its fruits in character. Many Christian converts, it is true, have sadly failed to show to the world evidence of transformed lives, and missionaries have by no means been without blemish, but there are transformed lives, and many, many of them, which silence opposition and criticism. The tribute paid by non-Christian Chinese to the memory of Dr. Jackson, who lost his life in Manchuria fighting the plague, is but one of the instances of the profound impression made by lives which are the products of Christian faith. There are few if any Christian communities in China where there are not to be found Chinese who can be pointed to as living examples of the power that is in Christ, and there are some such Christian Chinese who are national figures. It is such living epistles that have furnished in all ages and in all countries the greatest evidence and the most forceful appeal in behalf of Christianity. While the church retains a sufficient grip on the living God to enable it to present

to each generation such evidences of unique power it will continue to be a force in national life.

What must the church do if it is to insure the permanence and the growing influence of its power in China? First of all, as we have been so often and so forcibly reminded, it must take advantage of the opportunity that it now has. Before the transient elements in its popularity have disappeared, it must make a mighty effort in behalf of China. The very nature of the causes that have given us this opportunity forbid us to expect that they will ever operate again. Only once in long centuries does an alien civilization come to a nation with the appeal with which occidental civilization has come to China. As far as one can see, there will never be another time when the world will be Europeanized as it is being today. Never again may Christendom present so forcibly a culture for world acceptance. The church has not faced so great an opportunity since the time when it stood to the peoples of Northern Europe as the exponent and the vehicle of the coveted culture of the ancient world. Should we of the Western church fail in this crisis, no future generation may have the opportunity to retrieve our neglect. We must give to the missionary forces and to the church in China all the reinforcements and aid of which our resources are capable.

In doing this, we must take advantage of the permanent elements in the appeal of Christianity to the Chinese mind. We must continue to stress the social message of the church. We must give practical evidence in support of our claim that our faith has within it a

force which will regenerate China collectively and socially as well as individually. Education, medical work, social service in the cities and the country must continue to be developed.

We must, in addition, continue to dwell upon the ethical note. If the church were ever to subordinate its moral message to the discussion of ritual or dogma or forms of organization, its progress in China would be seriously threatened. The Chinese have been trained to judge the tree by its fruits, and if the church should ever confine its loyalty to its Lord to lip service, to the saying of creeds, and to outward form, and should neglect to do the things that he commands, its days of influence in China will be numbered.

Furthermore, if the church is to appeal to the thinking men of China, it must see that intellectually it presents its message in a way which will appeal to the modern mind as being rational. The mass of the people are yet uncritical intellectually and probably will be for some time to come. The trained minds of China, however, are by tradition agnostic in tendency. They give their attention to the scientific side of Western learning, to engineering, economics, history, government, and diplomacy. In contrast with the mystical Indian they are practical. They will insist that Christian truth as it is presented shall stand the test of modern science, that it be rational. They are already, as an interesting investigation of a few years ago showed, reading translations of Western books which prepare them to be critical of Christian theology. Missionaries and Chinese workers must avail themselves of all the new light

which the scientific, historical, and philosophical progress of the past century has shed on Christian truth if they are to present their message in an intellectual garb which will not seem to the newer Chinese student to be inconsistent with what he is learning in the schools. It follows that while there is still a large place among the uneducated for a consecrated ministry, Chinese and foreign, which has not had much formal education, there is increasing need for a ministry, equally consecrated, but possessed of the best training that modern schools can give, a ministry which, speaking from the vantage-point of full membership in the new age, can interpret to China the message of Christ in terms which will be consistent with its best thought.

Then the church must as rapidly as possible adapt itself to the new nationalism of China. The Chinese are becoming intensely patriotic and nationally self-conscious. If the church should continue to appeal to Chinese as something foreign, it is lost as far as any large influence on the nation is concerned. The leadership must increasingly be intrusted to the Chinese, and men must be developed to assume that leadership. The Young Men's Christian Association owes at least part of its remarkable success to the fact that it has so identified itself with the Chinese and has so nearly turned over the control of its organization to the Chinese. The problem is not as simple as it seems. It involves thorny questions of adequate salaries for the Chinese staff, of self-support, and of the control of funds raised abroad. But it must in some way be solved.



The church must as rapidly as possible make itself Chinese in thought and form as well as in leadership. Again we speak the words glibly and realize in general the truth of the principle, but the details baffle us. Will the time ever come when the church can take over and give Christian meaning to the great Chinese holidays, to the Ch'ing Ming festival, for instance, as it has to some of the great pre-Christian holidays of the Occident? Will it be able to utilize the best of the Chinese classics in its services and teachings, giving them an honorable place as scriptures whose deeper longings our Lord came to fulfil, scriptures which in a sense point the way to him? The foreign element cannot be eliminated. It has not been in the West, nor from Buddhism in China, but the apostles and prophets can and should be made to speak good Chinese as they have good English and good German. Christianity can become so identified with the life of China that its foreign origin will never discredit it with the patriotic.

Then the church must achieve greater unity. The past few years have brought progress, but there are still waste of energy and lack of efficiency wrought by divisions and needless duplications of effort. It is possible too that the awakened nationalism may demand a more nearly unified national church.

A divided church may save China, but it cannot do it as quickly or as effectively as though it were united. It can never bring to China the vision of Christ in his fulness.

Above all, however, the church must continue to conserve its life-giving faith, that dynamic so difficult to define accurately and yet the greatest fact which justifies its existence. If character continues to be transformed, if the morally weak are made strong, if the chains of appetite and passion continue to be broken, if characters are builded in the church into a strength and a beauty not known elsewhere, if from the church as a fountainhead of inspiration there continue to spring new movements for social regeneration, Christianity will continue to increase as a power which makes for righteousness. If the church can rightly interpret its great Master and can be true in heart and mind and life to him, it will be increasingly a source of power. Have we of the West come nearly enough to the perfect stature of the manhood of Christ to transmit his spirit and his power to our great neighbor? The question is one of the mighty challenges which is assaulting the ears of the church of today. We are being weighed in the balances, and future generations alone can tell whether we are to be found wanting.